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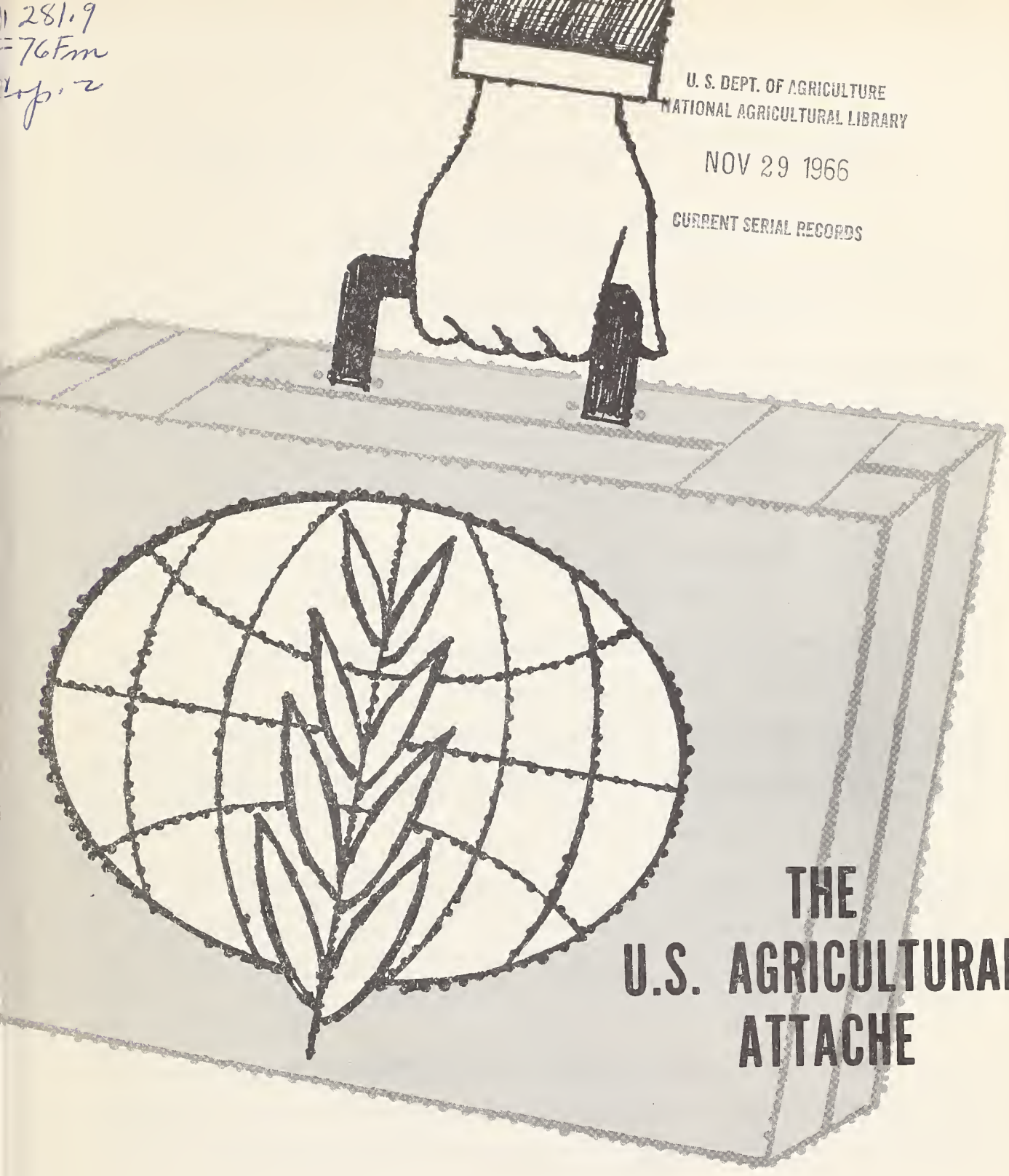

THE U.S. AGRICULTURAL ATTACHE

his history and his work

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Foreign Market Information Division

THE U.S. AGRICULTURAL ATTACHE

History and His Work

From its earliest days, America has depended on foreign countries as markets for its agricultural abundance and as sources of varieties to improve its crops and animals.

Although Christopher Columbus had brought samples of tobacco back to Spain with him after his voyage of 1492, the credit for initiating the first American agricultural export industry goes to the Englishman John Rolfe, husband of Pocahontas, who began to experiment with tobacco growth in Virginia in 1612. Probably his first shipment of tobacco to England was on the Elizabeth in 1613; maritime records are precise in stating that in 1615 the Flying Horse of Flushing landed in England "containing 105 pounds of Middling Tobacco."

The southern colonists had varying success in experiments with other agricultural products such as orange trees, cotton, potatoes, and pineapples.[1] Meanwhile, the northern colonists found an outlet in the Caribbean Islands for surplus grain and meat.[2]

Almost all colonial trade was with England. The value of annual agricultural exports was well over £ 200,000 by 1700 and had increased tenfold by the time of the Revolution.[3]

Leading Americans worked to improve the quality and quantity of crops and animals by introducing foreign varieties. In 1770, for example, Benjamin Franklin sent mulberry cuttings and silkworm eggs home to Pennsylvania from England, hoping to create a silk industry. The growth of American agriculture was based on plants and animals borrowed from lands across the ocean.

Since colonial times, America has often been troubled by agricultural surpluses and the need for finding new markets overseas. It has been often called on, too, to shoulder responsibility for helping feed less fortunate peoples of the world. Today's agricultural attaché is the product of a conscious effort to increase foreign markets for U.S. farm products and, at the same time, to channel America's agricultural abundance where it is most needed. To understand the attaché's functions it is necessary to trace briefly the history of the development of U.S. foreign agricultural representation.

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[1] L. C. Gray, History of Agriculture in the Southern United States to 1860, Vol. I, (New York: Peter Smith, 1941), pp. 21-25.

[2] P. W. Bidwell and J. I. Falconer, History of Agriculture in the Northern United States, 1620-1861, (New York: Peter Smith, 1941), p. 41.

[3] Charles H. Evans (comp.), Exports Domestic and Foreign from the American Colonies to Great Britain from 1697 to 1789, Inclusive, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1884).

Early Foreign Agricultural Representatives

The agricultural attaché has many prototypes in American history. Other Americans followed in Ben Franklin's footsteps by sending home plant varieties and animal breeds which they hoped would flourish in America. William Eaton, consul at Tunis during Washington's administration, sent several Barbary sheep to Secretary of State Timothy Pickering. Pickering presented a pair of the sheep to the Philadelphia Agricultural Society and the breed spread from there.

Importation of choice sheep increased sharply because of the young nation's desire to produce its own clothes. Ambassador Livingstone sent home a fine flock of French merinos from the royal sheep-fold at Rambouillet, and a Colonel Humphreys sent from Spain a flock of 75 ewes and 25 rams of pure Spanish merino blood, 91 of which were landed at Derby, Connecticut, in 1802.

During the administration of John Quincy Adams, the collection of plant and livestock species was systematized by instructions to U.S. consuls to forward rare plants and seeds to the Department of State for distribution in America. Later, the diplomatic corps and naval officers were asked to send valuable seeds to the Patent Office, which was responsible for their distribution. Small expenses were often reimbursed by Patent Office appropriations for "the promotion of the arts and sciences."

With the passing of years, U.S. agricultural explorers and scientists went farther and farther afield in their search for new species. The early 1850's saw the introduction and distribution in America of Cuban tobacco seed from Vieta de Abajo, alfalfa from Chile, peas from Japan, beans from Mexico, lima beans from Russia, duorra corn from St. Martin, cottonseed from Navigator's Island and Haiti, winter rape from France, and quinoa from Peru.

Later imports sent home by U.S. agricultural explorers included rice and soybeans from Japan; wheat and barley varieties from Australia, Chile, Mexico, South Africa, Russia, Germany, Turkey, Egypt, Algeria, Sicily, and Spain; spelt, vetches, lentils, and spurry from Prussia; winter flax from Russia; furze for prairie hedges from England; sainfoin from France; the carob tree, white lupin, chick peas, chufa, grass hemp, and melons from Spain; high-altitude Gondar and Ifat cotton from Ethiopia; the Rose apple from St. Helena; the jujupe plum, pistachio nut, and sweet-acorned and cork-barked oaks from Algeria; peachstones from New Zealand, Argentina, and Teneriffe; apricot stones and giant strawberry seed from Chile; and the deodar cedar, walnut Sinhara or edible water nut, hardy Kaddack cotton, and crocus saffron from Kashmir.

The early agricultural explorers caught the attention of Mark Twain, who happened to be a shipmate of one of these personages. He told about it in Innocents Abroad;

> I was proud to observe that among our excursionists were three ministers of the gospel, eight doctors, sixteen or eighteen ladies, several military and naval chieftains with sounding titles, an ample crop of "Professors" of various kinds, and a gentleman who had "COMMISSIONER OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA TO EUROPE, ASIA, AND AFRICA" thundering after his name in one awful blast! I had carefully prepared myself to take rather a back seat in that ship, because of the uncommonly select material...I had schooled myself to expect an imposing array of military and naval heroes, and to have to set that back seat still further back in consequence of it, maybe; but I state frankly that I was all unprepared for this crusher.

I fell under that titular avalanche a torn and blighted thing. I said if that potentate must go over in our ship, why I supposed he must--but that to my thinking, when the United States considered it necessary to send a dignitary of that tonnage across the ocean, it would be better taste, and safer, to take him apart and cart him over in sections, in several ships.

Ah, if I had only known then that he was only a common mortal, and that his mission had nothing more overpowering about it than the collecting of seeds and uncommon yams and extraordinary cabbages and peculiar bullfrogs...I would have felt so much relieved.

Exploratory agricultural missions somehow survived this attention, and explorers went to more and more remote and exotic places. In 1906 an employee of the Bureau of Plant Industry undertook one of the most difficult and dangerous missions when he crossed the mountains of northern Korea and southern Manchuria collecting 933 scions and seeds. By World War I, agricultural explorations had become quite common; today they are a routine part of American foreign agricultural activities.

First Appropriations for Agriculture

Although a number of the Founding Fathers, including George Washington and Thomas Jefferson, are famous for their agricultural interest and experiments, the new nation did not set up a separate agency of the federal government to handle agricultural matters. This situation was changed by an acute shortage of breadstuffs in the late 1830's which dramatized the need for some federal direction and planning.

At the suggestion of Commissioner of Patents Henry Ellsworth, Congress in 1839 appropriated $1,000 for the collection of agricultural statistics, investigations for promoting agriculture and rural economy, and the procurement of cuttings and seeds for free distribution among American farmers. After a lapse of two years, the appropriation was renewed in 1842 and doubled in 1843. In 1847, Congress voted $3,000, after which the agricultural appropriation was made regularly.

Foreign Agricultural Reporting

The Patent Office report of 1842 for the first time discussed foreign agricultural markets and duties on such commodities as cotton and fats and oils. Attention was given to the general U.S. agricultural export situation, agricultural imports, British Imperial preference, Canadian competition, and commercial policy. One comment bears repeating:

...the present surplus of agricultural products with the prospect of their increase, brings much discouragement, unless some market can be opened beyond the present demand...

Marketing problems are nothing new in American agriculture, having occurred at intervals since Colonial times.

As early as 1845 the Patent Office was receiving reports from a European traveler who voluntarily collected and sent back to Washington agricultural information from several countries. The beginnings of a regular foreign agricultural reporting service had been made.

The 1855 Patent Office report on agriculture reflected the growing interest in foreign agricultural statistics and foreign agricultural markets. It said:

> Some apology would seem to be due for the large amount of foreign statistics which are contained in this report; but this is regarded by many as quite as essential as the statistics of our own country, in order that we may know who are our competitors, and where an opening may occur for the sale of our products.

> The first annual report of the Commissioner of Agriculture in 1863--a year after the creation of a Department of Agriculture--announced that a new Statistics Division would collect data that. . . exhibit the commerce, both foreign and domestic, in leading agricultural products.

The following year, 1864, the Department of Agriculture's report contained articles whose titles sound like they came from a modern Foreign Agricultural Service publication: "Wool-Growing in Australia," by Dr. Charles Kenworthy; and "Sheep Farming in the Pampas," by the Rev. G. D. Garrow, a former superintendent of Methodist Episcopal missions in South America.

After the Civil War, as this country felt the need for more knowledge of foreign agricultural developments, a system of international agricultural exchanges was established with many governments of Europe, Asia, and South America. The United States in 1867 was regularly corresponding with Austria, Prussia, China, Japan, India, Guatemala, and British Honduras.

As time went on, government and trade interests wanted information developed by American investigators. So, in 1882 the Statistical Division of the Department of Agriculture established in the office of the consul-general in London an agency to collect statistics showing prospective demand in Europe for American products, especially grains and meats. In respect to wheat, corn, cotton, wines, oils, and beef and pork products, said the 1883 USDA Report,

> . . . the interests of the country are now so large and so affected by competing production of foreign nations, that this enlargement has been found absolutely necessary. . . Special investigation has been made during the year of the influence of American competition upon European agriculture.

The diversity of language, monetary units, weights and measures, and investigative methods complicated the compilation and interpretation of statistical documents received from foreign countries. This was partly responsible for the organization in 1894 of the Section of Foreign Markets, which also was given the job of disseminating information that would help expand foreign agricultural markets.

The section published a regular series of bulletins and circulars, and also answered special inquiries. Ten bulletins--relating to the United Kingdom, the German Empire, France, Canada, the Netherlands, Belgium, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, and Mexico--were prepared with a view to each country's possibilities as a customer of U.S. agriculture.

The Growing Need For Agricultural Representation Abroad

As the turn of the century approached, the Department of Agriculture was turning its attention to the problem of securing men trained in agriculture to serve as agricultural representatives abroad. The land-grant colleges were educating men along these lines, and a growing number of men were available who could report intelligently on market possibilities and crop production abroad.

The Department suggested that agricultural agents could do much to enlighten people abroad on the value of American farm products. The Department's 1902 report said:

> ...it seems that the time has come for decisive action in the matter of exploiting abroad [agricultural] products...and to accomplish this with the best results trained men, and men of good judgment will be required. If sufficient funds are available, it is planned to inaugurate this work in the forthcoming year in a limited way.

According to the same report, the leading competitive agricultural countries were already adopting such a plan.

By 1905, an employee of the Department's Bureau of Statistics was stationed in London. He made regular trips to the Continent to report on crop yields and conditions. His reports were sent to Washington each month for publication in the Crop Reporter, forerunner of today's monthly World Agricultural Production and Trade, published by the Foreign Agricultural Service.

However, the Department's work of collecting foreign agricultural information early in the century was largely taken over by the International Institute of Agriculture, established in 1905 through the efforts of the King of Italy and comprising 46 member countries. USDA's foreign reporting declined markedly after this, and in 1908 the divisions working on foreign agriculture were practically eliminated.

After World War I, the Department of Agriculture reestablished a world market-reporting service to supplement the crop-reporting activities of the International Institute of Agriculture. This step was prompted by increasing criticism of the Institute's reports, which were based largely on data provided by member governments.

Postwar Boom in Foreign Market Activities

The return to peace in 1918 marked the beginning of unusual activity among U.S. producers and exporters in preparation for the resumption of foreign trade. There was heightened interest in news of foreign market conditions. Studies were made regarding the foreign marketing of grain; flour; rice; seeds; cotton; vegetable oils and oil cake; dairy products; meats; fresh, dried, and canned fruits and vegetables; honey; nuts; and leaf tobacco.

The Department resumed its practice of reviewing foreign official and private publications, translating and abstracting material from them to answer inquiries, and, to a growing extent, publishing circulars, leaflets, and magazine articles. Much material of this type was published in Foreign Crops and Markets, which was established in 1919 to provide U.S. farmers, traders, and government officials with timely, helpful information. (In 1963, this publication was incorporated with the weekly magazine, Foreign Agriculture.)

In May of 1919 an agricultural trade commissioner was stationed in London to study the markets for American agricultural products in the British Isles and Western Europe and to report regularly by letter and cable. This man, Edward Foley, is considered to have been America's first agricultural attaché in the modern sense, although he didn't have the title. At the time the London commissioner was appointed, hope was expressed that commissioners could also be assigned to France, Italy, and Denmark.

The commissioner's office In London was successful from the start, American trade interests being pleased with the advance information that was supplied. The Department's 1920 Report said:

> The first information regarding the shipment of 300,000 carcasses of Australian lambs to this country was received in a cablegram from our commissioner on February 28.
>
> This was widely publicized and had the effect of steadying the domestic market.

Special investigation by the London commissioner showed, among other things, that losses in fruit transportation and handling could be greatly reduced.

As more and more reports and publications came in and the Department's responsibilities in the field of foreign agriculture increased, a demand arose for experts in Washington to analyze and publicize the information concerning world agricultural supply and demand, production, carryover, and trends of consumption and trade. In 1917, a Foreign Markets Investigations Division, staffed with the needed experts, was set up in the Bureau of Markets. In 1922, the FMI division became the Foreign Section of the Division of Statistical and Historical Research in a newly consolidated Bureau of Markets and Crop Estimates which, in 1923, became part of the newly created Bureau of Agricultural Economics (BAE).

The good results of the work of the agricultural commissioner at London resulted in the establishment of additional posts. In 1922, the Department of Agriculture had representatives in Argentina and the Balkans, as well as in London. The representative at Buenos Aires could be maintained for only part of 1923 due to lack of funds, but in 1924, the Department had agricultural commissioners at London, Berlin, Budapest, and Buenos Aires in addition to its representative with the International Institute of Agriculture at Rome. In 1925, there were commissioners at London, Berlin, Vienna, and Mexico City; and in 1927, a commissioner was assigned to Shanghai to report on China and Japan.

Establishment of the Foreign Agricultural Service

The Department of Agriculture's foreign operations were hampered by the fact that its representatives were not diplomatically accredited by the Department of State in the same manner as an officer of an embassy or legation. As Commissioner Foley told a congressional committee:

> The reason we ask for diplomatic standing is merely that our names can appear on the list of regular employees of the U.S. Government in London...the State Department would inform the British Government that we are such employees...We have asked the State Department to do that and they seem to think that could not be done without a special law.

Agricultural organizations and congressional leaders became concerned and began to urge separate status for the agricultural representatives. This concern took the form of Representative John Ketcham's "Foreign Crop Marketing and Report Bill," introduced in 1924, the purpose of which was

> ...to promote American agriculture by making more extensively available and by expanding the service now rendered by the Department of Agriculture in gathering and disseminating information regarding agricultural production, competition, and demand in foreign countries in promoting the sale of farm products abroad and in other ways.

The Secretary of Agriculture wrote to the House Agriculture Committee in support of the Ketcham bill:

> This bill defines the scope of the work of the department in the foreign field and puts it in the form of permanent legislation, so that there cannot possibly be any misunderstanding as to the authority for work which the department has been carrying on for the past 40 years. I trust there will be no delay in enacting it into law.

Opposition to the bill was largely centered in a group which believed that the commercial attachés and employees of the Department of Commerce assigned to foreign posts could adequately serve the interests of the American farmer. Many believed that agricultural produce properly came under the supervision of the Department of Commerce "as soon as it left the farm gate." In the light of these objections, a statement of Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover is significant. In early 1928 he told the House Agriculture Committee that the latest Ketcham bill

> ...is a helpful step toward more uniform and better administration in that it places the proposed staff of the Department of Agriculture on a comparable footing with the Foreign Commerce Service...It seems to me that the passage of this measure will contribute materially toward more effective collaboration between the two services, and I hope, therefore, that it will receive early and favorable consideration by Congress.

The House was ultimately convinced of the necessity of the attache posts mentioned in the pending legislation--London, Berlin, Paris, Marseilles, Copenhagen, Bucharest, Buenos Aires, Melbourne, Johannesburg or Pretoria, and Shanghai. The bill passed the House 195 to 75 and was speedily passed by the Senate, where Senator Charles McNary had spearheaded the drive. President Hoover approved the bill on June 5, 1930.

Developments Since 1930

In 1930, U.S. agricultural commissioners were resident at London, Berlin, Marseilles, Shanghai, Belgrade, Buenos Aires, Pretoria, and Sydney. In the same year, the number of commodity specialists in the newly created Foreign Agricultural Service in Washington was increased to eight.

Economy measures brought on by the depression caused the closing of attaché offices in Australia and South Africa and the recall of one man from each of the posts at Buenos Aires, Belgrade, and Marseilles.

Principal developments in the work of the Foreign Agricultural Service in the 1930's included: (1) more emphasis on commodity, rather than area, reporting in the European offices; (2) a marked increase in participation by FAS officers at international conferences; and (3) a considerable extension in the activities of the agricultural attachés as advisers to the heads of the embassies or legations to which they were accredited. Foreign projects of a typical year (1936) included appraisals of French wheat policy, the agricultural production capacity of Germany, the expansion of cotton production in Argentina, recent developments in Soviet agriculture, the present and potential agricultural resources of Manchuria, and agricultural production in the Philippine Islands.

In late 1938, as part of a general reorganization of the Department of Agriculture, the Foreign Agricultural Service Division was transferred from the Bureau of Agricultural Economics to the Office of the Secretary. In mid-1939, as a result of the President's Reorganization Plan No. 2, the Foreign Agricultural Service became the Office of Foreign Agricultural Relations (OFAR) and the nine agricultural officers stationed abroad were transferred to the Foreign Service of the Department of State.

OFAR continued operations with its Washington staff of commodity and area analysts and maintained close liaison with Foreign Service agricultural officers. Meanwhile OFAR attempted to maintain through the State Department an agricultural reporting schedule.

By 1944, agricultural attachés were stationed at London, Buenos Aires, Rio de Janeiro, Ottawa, Havana, Mexico City, and Moscow, and agricultural reporters were stationed at Santiago, Bogota, Managua, Lima, Caracas, and Brussels. A dramatic expansion of attaché operations began with the end of World War II, when agricultural attachés, officers, or advisers were appointed to 38 new posts, mostly in Latin America and Europe.

The number of posts varied in the unsettled postwar years, but since 1954 many attaché posts have been added, putting the total number of posts at 60. Most recent additions have been the posts in Australia, Congo, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Israel, Kenya, Liberia, Morocco, Portugal, the Rhodesias and Nyasaland, Switzerland, El Salvador, and Syria.

Attachés have also been appointed in recent years to Brussels, Belgium, for coverage of European Common Market activities, and to Geneva, Switzerland--European headquarters of the United Nations and many other international organizations.

In 1953 the Foreign Agricultural Service was reconstituted in the Department of Agriculture, retaining from OFAR the commodity and area specialists.

In the following year, Public Law 690 returned the agricultural attachés to the jurisdiction of the Secretary of Agriculture. As indicated by House Report 966 of the 82nd Congress (August 23, 1951) and the 1954 Report of Agricultural Trade Missions, the feeling had long been widespread that the agricultural attaché service could function at peak efficiency and with best results for the American farmer and farm industry only as an organic part of the Department of Agriculture. It was felt that the Secretary of Agriculture should select, train and assign the attaches and should design and supervise their reports. And there were those who felt that some separation from the diplomatic corps would be more in keeping with the down-to-earth nature of the agricultural attachés' work.

With these structural changes, an assistant administrator for attachés was added to the FAS staff.

In the years immediately after World War II, the emphasis on foreign aid was on rebuilding and rehabilitating a war-torn world. In agriculture, the problem was one of allocating worldwide short supplies. Market development did not receive major attention until domestic farm surpluses and foreign buying power built up.

The impact of agricultural surpluses caused a redirection of emphasis in U.S. foreign agricultural policies in the early 1950's. Through 1953 and early 1954, House and Senate committees considered various ways to dispose of the growing farm surpluses without disrupting world markets. The result was Public Law 480, sponsored by Senator Andrew Schoeppel of Kansas and Representative Robert Harrison of Nebraska, which authorized the sale of U.S. farm surpluses

to friendly foreign countries for their currencies and also provided for barter and donation programs. As the 1950's progressed, market development work became an increasingly important aspect of the agricultural attaché's responsibilities.

The early 1960's marked two developments involving FAS and its work. Responsibility for foreign trade statistics, monetary matters, and agricultural analyses by regions was transferred out of FAS to two new agencies, Economic Research Service and Statistical Reporting Service. This action left FAS free to expand its scope of market promotion activities. And, at about the same time, new opportunities for market expansion were opened up through legislation that provided for long-term dollar credit sales of American farm commodities under Public Law 480.

Functions of the Agricultural Attaché

The principal functions of the U.S. agricultural attaché and his staff are to report on agricultural production, trade policy, and market development in his area of assignment. As CBS news commentator Claude Mahoney said in a broadcast of February 8, 1957, after visiting several overseas ports:

> ...the agricultural attaché is the representative of the American farmer abroad, and is working constantly to find markets and promote good will for American farm products...
>
> He's hunting markets for American goods...he is busy with agricultural reporting and analysis; trade promotion and market development...he negotiates with foreign governments; he advises the ambassador; he assists official visitors and traders; he tries to break down trade barriers, and he reports dangerous infestations and outbreaks of such epidemics as foot-and-mouth disease in animals.

The fact that the United States is the world's largest exporter and second largest importer of agricultural products makes the work of its agricultural attachés of utmost importance. The American farmer and farm industry are dependent to a large degree on foreign markets, and the American consumer is dependent on many agricultural products that are not grown domestically. To keep American farm and trade interests alert to the agricultural situation in all parts of the world is a job that falls largely on the shoulders of the agricultural attachés.

The U.S. agricultural attaché usually comes from a rural area and is usually a land-grant college graduate with one or more degrees in an agricultural field and generally with a major in economics. His course work includes price analysis, land management, market structures, and statistics, as well as technical courses. Before receiving his foreign assignment he has had professional experience in domestic agricultural problems.

To be eligible for appointment to an agricultural attaché staff, the applicant must qualify under Civil Service standards as an agricultural economist, agricultural marketing specialist, or general agriculturalist. Farming experience is a decided advantage in attaché work overseas. An applicant must be willing to accept assignment anywhere in the world, depending on the needs of the service. He must be able to work harmoniously with FAS and embassy associates and with trade and government contacts in foreign countries.

While knowledge of the local language is not an absolute requirement, its value to the job is recognized and language familiarity is given consideration in selection. There are language training programs for those assigned overseas.

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Although the attaché is "attached to" the American ambassador's or consul general's staff in his country of assignment, he is an employee of the Department of Agriculture and as such is directly responsible to the Secretary of Agriculture for his program activities.

While the agricultural attaché is today primarily interested in reporting on agricultural conditions and developing agricultural markets, his duties encompass a wide range of activities in behalf of U.S. farmers and U.S. foreign relations. He is a valued member of the foreign service team. Like his predecessors, he must be constantly alert for new agricultural production, processing, and marketing techniques of interest to U.S. agriculture.

Summary

The United States has always been vitally interested in agricultural conditions in foreign countries. Even in the period of the Revolutionary War, diplomats, scientists, and travelers made it their business to find and bring back seeds or animals that showed promise of adapting to American climate and soil. As our agriculture developed, we became even more interested in finding new strains to improve our crops and livestock. As our agricultural production increased, farm and government leaders turned to the problem of finding and developing markets for our abundance.

Over the entire course of American history, the collection and dissemination of foreign agricultural information has been an important function of the federal government. This nation has always been a substantial exporter and importer of agricultural products. At times, as during war, information is needed to get the most out of agricultural scarcity; at other times, information is needed to get the most out of agricultural abundance.

At all times, consuls, diplomats, agricultural explorers, special agents, agricultural commissioners and finally agricultural attachés have carried out an important mission. Today the American agricultural attaché serves his country with the high degree of technical competence and broad agricultural knowledge that his responsibilities require.